

# LIMERICK CURFEW MURDER

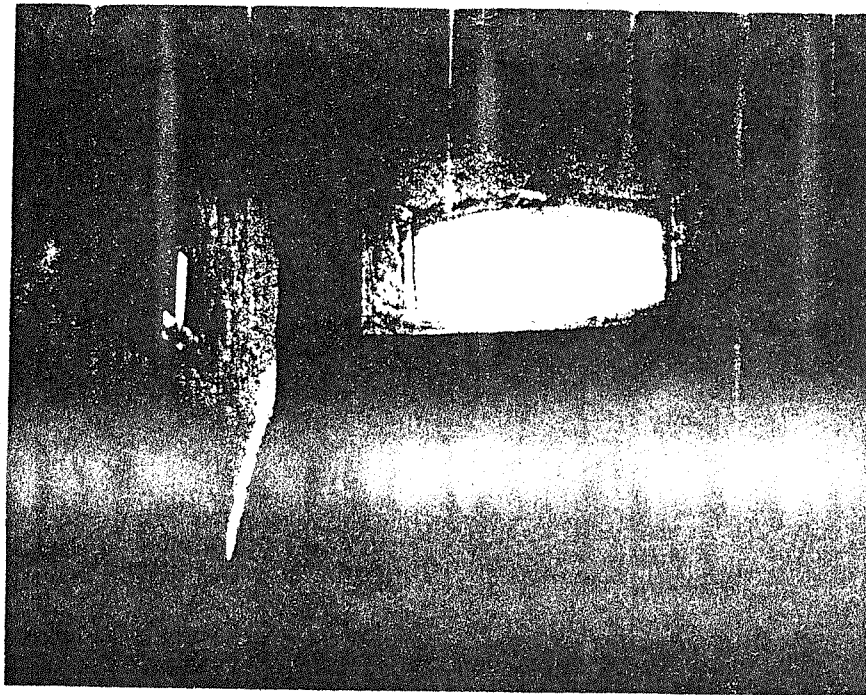


On the morning of March the seventh, 1921, Seoirse Clancy, Mayor of Limerick, and Michael O'Callaghan, his predecessor in office, were foully murdered by British police in their homes, and in the presence of their wives. The Mayoress, Mrs. Clancy, was wounded during the assassination of her husband. The murder of Michael O'Callaghan took place about 1.10 a.m., and that of Seoirse Clancy about 2.30 a.m. Some hours previously Joseph O'Donoghue of the I.R.A. was murdered and his bullet-ridden body was found in the street in the morning.

The questions which this article is written to answer are: (1) Who was George Clancy? (2) What were the circumstances of his death? (3) What manner of man was he?

His relatives, the companions of his early manhood, and his friends and fellow workers of later years, have contributed towards the answers given here to the first questions and to the third. His wife sets out in detail the answer to the second question.

WHO WAS GEORGE CLANCY?



Co. Limerick, to watch for their coming, but circumstances diverted the ship's course, and the arms were landed in Howth. During the summer holidays he organised a Volunteer Company in his native place, and later acted as Commandant in a Volunteer Camp at Kilkee, Co. Clare. Returning to Limerick, flushed with hope and full of good spirits after his camp experience, he was faced with a new situation. The war had broken out, Redmond and his followers had declared for unqualified co-operation with England and, obviously, the Volunteers were about to be split into two antagonistic bodies. Seoirse's spirited answer to the pessimists put new heart into them: "Even if we can muster only fifty men, we must stand our ground". When the split came and those in Limerick who chose to stand by Ireland went on parade, 208 were present.

**Marriage:** In the July of 1915 he was married to Maire Ni Cillin, whom he had met at Colaiste na Mumhan, In Ballingeary, and later in the Limerick Gaelic League.

**After 1916:** The Rising of Easter, 1916, was followed by anxious days and nights for a handful of men waiting orders, and for their leaders, heavily burdened with responsibility, in a city full of troops and in the midst of a population openly hostile. No one felt the situation more keenly than Seoirse. His arrest followed in May, but he and the others taken with him were released after a few days. At the historic election of de Valera for East Clare in 1917, Seoirse did effective work as a speaker at the meetings and as personation agent on the day of the poll. Prominent among the speakers during the campaign was Thomas Ashe, who received the answer to

his prayer: "Let me carry your Cross for Ireland, Lord," when he died in gaol. The immediate result of the Mountjoy tragedy was the revival of public parades of Volunteers, met by the Government by arresting the officers in turn. First, Commandment Colivet was taken, then Seoirse, who stepped into his place, and so on with others.

**In Gaol:** The prisoners were taken to Cork gaol and there Seoirse met Thomas MacCurtain, murdered in 1920, when Lord Mayor of Cork and his successor, Terence McSwiney - the Martyr of Brixton - whom Seoirse had already known at Ballingeary. The numerous Cork prisoners were being tried by courtmartial in turn, and it was agreed that the Courts should not be recognised. Seoirse contended that in no case should an address be made to the Court and that non-recognition would be best shown by a short reply when the prisoners were asked to plead. He suggested the Irish phrase - "Nil meas madra agam ar an gCuirt seo" - and after some discussion, his proposal was agreed to. However, before the time for their trial came, the prisoners went on hunger strike, were released, and the Limerick men received a popular ovation on their arrival in the City.

**Conscription Year:** The year 1918 was occupied with the establishment of Sinn Fein Clubs and the various other activities for the strengthening of the movement. As the year advanced the need for intensive organisation became more apparent. Ireland was threatened with conscription and the country resolved to resist. To prepare military resistance in Limerick district was Seoirse's task, as his senior officers

were in gaol or "on the run". He had also to continue his work in the schools, to do the routine work of his Battalion, and to attend meetings of all kinds. The strain of those strenuous months from May till October, when finally England abandoned Irish Conscription, told on Seoirse's



**Roger Casement (1864-1916)**  
Hanged, London, 3 August, 1916

constitution and highly strung temperament. He fell a victim to the severe influenza epidemic which came that winter, and was seriously ill for some weeks. When he regained his strength he had to give up teaching work, and, instead, became Local Superintendent of the Irish National Assurance Co. Within a year he had established a fairly remunerative business.

**In Municipal Life:** At the Municipal elections of 1920's Seoirse was elected senior Alderman of the City. His poll was more than double that of any other candidate. He had the votes of his former pupils who had grown to be men and women, of the parents of his later pupils. Said one poor woman: "I'll vote for Clancy who never closed his eye on my child." Seoirse was Offered the Mayoralty but he declined it, as he had yet no experience of municipal life. Michael O'Callaghan was elected Mayor for 1920.

**I.R. Loan:** Seoirse was appointed Organiser in the City and Liberties of Limerick for the Dail Eireann Loan of 1919. He visited the country districts to help the collection took charge of all monies received and kept the accounts - a matter of unexampled difficulty, as house searches were frequent and personal searches in the streets of common occurrence. In June 1920 Seoirse was in a position to go to Dublin and hand the money intact to the Finance Minister, Michael Collins.

In January 1921 George Clancy was appointed Mayor of Limerick. In his address to the Corporation after his election he said he was a hundred per cent

Sinn Fein, and when the time would come, he would be found pure wool and unshrinkable. Those words recalled themselves to his wife while he stood without a tremor before his murderers, and she realized in a flash that he was about to die.

#### HOW GEORGE CLANCY DIED:

**What a "Raid" Was:** Raids and searches were an outstanding feature of the English campaign against Irish Nationality in the years 1916 to 1921. They usually took place late at night when the people had retired, or in the early hours of the morning, and the searchers were not provided with anything in the nature of a search warrant. At first the armed forces were usually accompanied by a responsible Police or Military Officer, and were duly authorised by the Military Governor of the district, but as time went on unauthorised raids freely took place, and the forces employed, whether sent officially or otherwise conducted themselves without any regard for the persons or property of the occupants of any house they chose to enter. In the final stages of the Terror armed forces of the Crown raided private houses with the set purpose of murdering prominent Republicans.

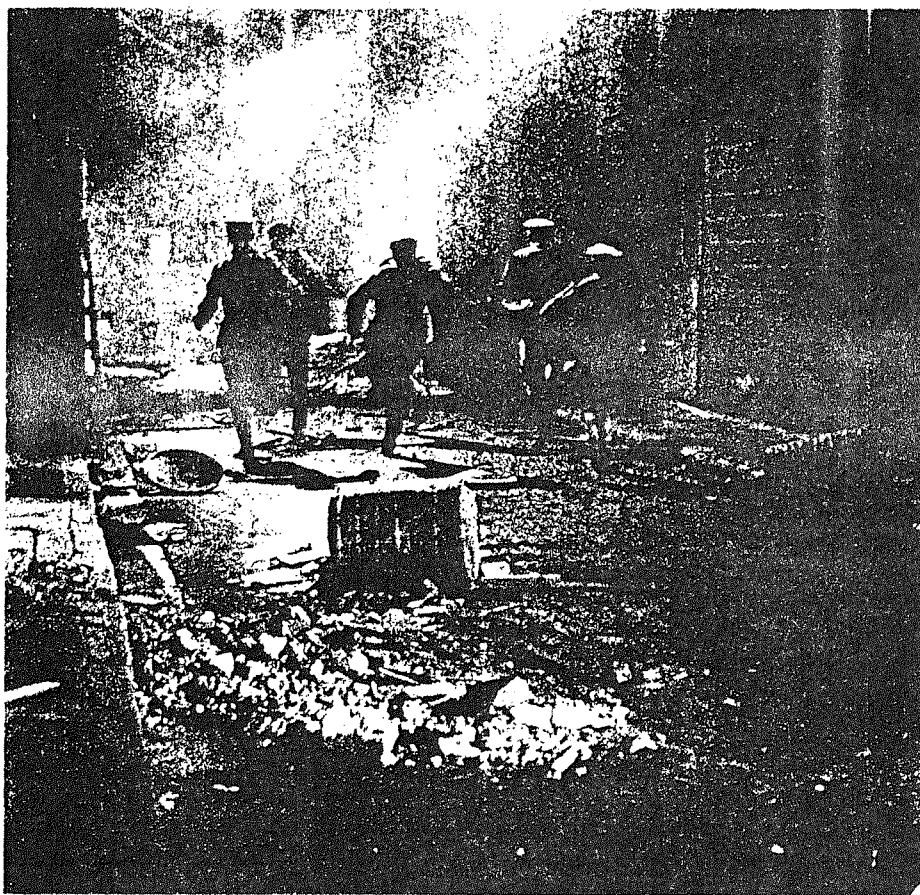
In Limerick the raids began in May 1916 after the military had taken possession of a number of rifles, the property of the Irish Volunteers. In various parts of the City during the night, parties of soldiers and police searched houses and arrested men - a score of citizens, including Seoirse MacFlannacda. So frequent were the searches in that and the following two years at the Clancy home that no record had been kept of them.

**Mrs. Clancy's Narrative:** Towards the end of 1919 Seoirse made it a point not to sleep at home so that his activities might not be interrupted by another term of imprisonment. One November morning at 3 a.m. there came a loud knocking, awakening the household. I got up, called the maid, and together we went to the door. I asked who was there and got the answer "Military" followed by "if the door is not opened in 30 seconds it will be broken in". I opened the door and in rushed a military officer, a number of soldiers and one member of the R.I.C. The Officer asked for my husband, and I answered that he was not at home. He then placed his men all over the house, in the garden and back yard. He searched the house over himself minutely, examining every place, even the hen run. This search lasted about two hours, and as the night was extremely cold I was feeling pretty bad when it was over. When going, the officer informed me they would come again. Nightly expecting another raid my husband and myself had not very much rest for the next few months, but strange to say, were not again visited for a considerable time.

How Women Suffered: My only sister died in September, 1920, and then my parents came to reside with us. On the night of December 7th, 1920, at 10.30 p.m. the long expected summons came. I went to the door and I asked who was there. The hall was quickly filled with R.I.C., Black and Tans and cadets in uniform and mufti, all carrying rifles and revolvers, a number of them being under the influence of drink. They were led by a man in civilian clothes, brandishing a revolver in one hand and having a flash lamp in the other. They spread through the house, even invading the privacy of the room in which my mother and father were in bed. My poor mother got up and dressed, but my father, being an invalid, could not do so. The raiders asked for my husband and when I said he was from home on business, they replied I should tell them where he was. I repeated I did not know, and they then said if I did not tell them they would burn me out. I was detained in the diningroom for over an hour surrounded by ten policemen and a cadet in uniform who sat on a table dangling his legs and enjoying the insults and abuse poured on me. They told me we were murderers, that we knew all about certain ambushes, and that we brought my parents to live with us so as to cloak our misdeeds, and so on. One of their number, an R.I.C. sergeant, ordered two men to go up upstairs and carry my father out of the house to the Avenue, so that they could, as he said, "blow the place to pieces." At the same time he ordered others down to the lorry for petrol. Another sergeant went into the sittingroom and took a picture from the wall - a camp group of Volunteers, with my husband and myself in it - and called me to walk on it. I refused, he then asked the maid to do so, but she taking her cue from me, also refused. He walked on it himself, and tearing the picture out, burned it. This same man put the maid, a young girl of about eighteen, with her back to the wall of the sittingroom and questioned her about her home and people. Then in a threatening manner he told her to clear out of my house before six the next evening and tell her father to get her "decent" employment. Some of the raiders then left the house and returned in a short time with two women searchers. My old mother of 70, the young girl and myself were sent into the sittingroom to suffer the humiliation of being searched while the men went through the house and ransacked every corner of it. Before leaving, the R.I.C. sergeant, who had trampled on the photograph and who seemed to be in command of the raiders, officers and cadets included, told me to the evident amusement of the cadet before mentioned that if my husband did not report at William Street Barracks before 7 o'clock the next evening, they would

come again the next night and actually burn us out.

The Auxiliary Officer's Raid: On February 27th 1921 at 10.30 a.m. we were saying the family Rosary before retiring when we were startled by a frantic knocking at the front door. My husband jumped up and told us not to be frightened as it was probably a raid, for Michael O'Callaghan had told him that on the previous Tuesday night raiders at his home said that they intended giving his successor a Lord Mayor's show. My husband went to the door, asked who was there, and received the reply "Military". I followed him to the door and when he opened it I saw a number of soldiers in charge of an officer in mufti, the same who had been in charge of the raiders at Michael O'Callaghan's home on Tuesday, February 22nd. The avenue outside was lighted up by the searchlight from the car on the road. The officer asked my husband was he Mr. Clancy, and being answered in the affirmative, expressed surprise at finding him at home. My husband said there was no reason why he should not be in his own house, adding that he had no choice but to be indoors after curfew. The officer said he had come to search the house and stationed some soldiers in the hall. He first visited the sittingroom, which he searched minutely, then asked my husband to accompany him to the diningroom. Here he again expressed surprise that my husband was at home and received the same reply. My husband afterwards told me that he learned from this man that he was in the auxiliary division; and remarked to me what a charming cultivated voice he had. Before this officer completed his search of the diningroom he went out to the hall door and called a cadet, whom he sent upstairs with me to search the bedrooms. A soldier with a rifle accompanied us. My husband explained that my father was an invalid confined to bed and the officer said he would not be disturbed, but that he wanted to see our room. This cadet was the same that had come with the police on the terrifying raid on December 7th 1920. When we got upstairs the cadet said to me that he was surprised to find my husband at home. On my replying there was no reason why he should not be in his own home, he said, "but he was not at home on previous occasions." I then said my husband's business took him frequently from home. His next remark was that they the Government forces, intend giving us a Lord Mayor's show. I then said was not this visit a Lord Mayor's show, to which he replied "Not at all - a Lord Mayor's show, when we all come dressed in our best as we do in London," adding that he would bring his most powerful searchlight. After a short time the Auxiliary officer came up, looked around the room, and then they both went to my father's room where they remained only a few minutes. In the hall as they were leaving, my husband



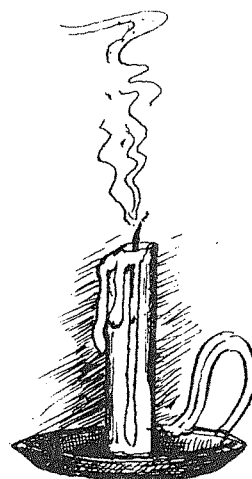
referred to the bad raid we had when there were only women in the house. The officer expressed sympathy, adding that this was an Official Military raid.

The Murder Raid: My father died on the 4th March 1921 and was buried on Sunday 6th March. That night friends remained with us up to curfew hour, 10 p.m. Then we had the family prayers and we chatted for a little while before going upstairs, Seoirse insisted that I should sleep in my mother's room that night so that she might not be lonely. He came in with us and remained some time consoling her and trying to lighten her sorrow. Before getting to bed I discovered that the candle in his room was still alight and I went in as I was anxious about him - he had a slight cold some days. I found him awake reading Keating's Defence of the Mass in Irish. He promised me that he would get to sleep quickly, so I wished him "goodnight" and left him. It was then midnight, and though we didn't know it, Joseph O'Donoghue was at that time dead and his murderers were making their way to Michael O'Callaghan's house. When I got to bed I fell almost immediately into a deep sleep, for I was very tired and lacked sleep for over a week owing to my father's illness and death. About 1.30 a loud noise awakened me. I jumped up startled and asked what was the matter. My mother said "Oh God! it is

a raid, they are hammering at the door." I got on my dressing gown and slippers, calling out to my husband as I did so, "Seoirse, I will open the door." He answered "No Moll only a raid. I will", and he went down the stairs ahead of me. He held a candlestick in his hand and said back to me "It's all right Moll, only a raid" before opening the hall door he asked who was there, and got the answer "Military". I was just behind him at the foot of the stairs, and when he opened the door I saw three tall men wearing goggles with caps drawn well down over their faces and the collars of their coats turned up. Two stood at one side of the door and one at the other; one of the two held a flash light. Even then I did not realize the murderous work they had come to do. The man at the right asked "Are you Clancy", pointing a revolver at Seoirse. My husband answered "Yes, I am," and stood straight in front of him. Then this man said, "Come out here, we want you." Seoirse asked, "What for?" and the man said, more loudly, "Come outside." "No I won't," Seoirse answered and stepped back a pace or two, opening the door still wider as he held the knob in his hand. The spokesman then stepped into the hall and shouted, "Then, take this," and before I could move fired three shots at him. I then dashed between them screaming and trying to move Seoirse back

and push the man away, but even as I did so, he emptied his revolver. I heard in all, seven shots. The men then rushed off and banged the hall door, leaving me in the dark, as the candle Seoirse held had fallen and the gas was not lighted. I did not know then that I was wounded. I thought the sting I felt in my wrist was a blow I got in the struggle. I groped about with my hands to find my husband but could not. Then I saw the door at the end of the hall and also a door beyond it leading to the yard were open. I called Seoirse by name and getting no answer I rushed round the yard still calling him but could not find him. I opened the gate leading into the garden and ran across to a friend's house, falling many times on the way. I knocked at Mr. Barry's bedroom window and asked him to come and help me as my husband was shot and I could not find him. I went back immediately and passing in through the gate I stumbled over my husband's feet. He had fallen in the yard and I had passed out without seeing him. The maid, who was now up and dressed, came into the yard when she heard my cry on discovering him. Between us we tried to lift Seoirse up but failed as my hand was useless. I then discovered I was wounded and the blood was streaming from my wrist. I ran back again to Mr. Barry and told him I could not lift Seoirse as I was wounded in the wrist. He was dressed by this time and came to me immediately, and with the help of the maid we lifted Seoirse into the kitchen. My aged mother had come down the stairs in her night attire and had been wandering about the yard in her bare feet looking for Seoirse and myself. She was a pitiabie Seoirse and myself. She was a pitiable sight with her poor feet covered with his blood. My only thought now was to get the priest to my poor Seoirse while he was still alive. I then asked Ned - Mr. Barry - to go for the priest, and he went off not knowing but that he himself might be shot on the way. I knelt beside Seoirse and tried to say the Act of Contrition in his ear - he was breathing very heavily but seemed unable to speak. In a few minutes Canon O'Driscoll, who had prepared Seoirse's mother for death, arrived and administered the last Sacraments to the pupil he had encouraged and taught at Bruff Seminary 25 years before. After this Seoirse opened his eyes and looked at me, then he looked at the Canon and back again at me. I was now faint from loss of blood so the Canon led me away just as Seoirse expired. During this time another friend, Miss Renehan, had come in and had gone upstairs with my nearly demented mother, washed her feet and dressed her. At about half past two Canon O'Driscoll decided to go to the Strand Barracks and ask the military officers to phone for a doctor as my arm was still bleeding and I was getting weaker. After a short time he came back accompanied by three military officers, from them he learned that Michael O'Callaghan had also

been murdered. They said it was a dreadful occurrence and that they had phoned for Dr. Dundon at Barrington's who would be with me immediately. The military had scarcely left when some police arrived including a District Inspector and sergeant the men who had already conveyed Revd. Father Philip, O.F.M. to Mrs. O'Callaghan's. The Dead Mayor: As the morning advanced friends hurried to me, and, as the news spread to the City hundreds poured from every side to weep and give me sympathy. Early Father Philip, O.F.M. arrived and, then and afterwards, he was a source of help and consolation to me during all that terrible time. The nuns of St. John's Hospital came to do the needful offices of the dead. Seoirse's friends and comrades Gaelic Leaguers and Volunteers - gathered to take charge of all arrangements, to keep guard in and about the house, and so save me from as much inconvenience and worry as possible. For two days there was a constant stream of people who came to see their dead Mayor and to say a prayer for his soul. The Lord Bishop said the Rosary in Irish by his side, and hundreds of the little children who loved him so paid a last tribute to their master. During the two nights - Monday and Tuesday his comrades stood guard in the room where he lay, and the Rosary was recited almost without intermission. On Wednesday he lay in state at Saint John's Cathedral with his murdered comrades, and next day six Irish Mayors bore his body to the grave.



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